

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the world of cased photographs and tintypes. Cased images were produced between 1840 and the mid-1860s, and are regarded as fine works of craftsmanship and art. Families that have cased images of their ancestors are blessed, as these photographs are few in number. You only have to remember that these images are over 150 years old to appreciate their intrinsic and personal value.

ish before being sensitized with silver fumes. The surface was very delicate, and could be scratched by the slightest contact with a foreign object.

The ambrotype was not as susceptible to scratches, but its glass surface could be cracked if mishandled.

The majority of daguerreotypes and ambrotypes were placed in cases, though a few were put into wall or stand-up frames. If you own a loose daguerreotype or



Figure i-1. A beautiful c. 1860 ambrotype in a thermoplastic case.

Defining the Cased Image

Simply put, cased images include daguerreotypes, ambrotypes, and some of the earliest tintypes. The images were placed into protective cases since the photographs were very delicate and susceptible to damage from the slightest mishandling.

Daguerreotypes were created by coating a copper plate with silver, which was then polished to a mirror-like fin-

ambrotype, chances are the case deteriorated or was so damaged that it was discarded.

Tintypes were initially placed in cases like daguerreotypes and ambrotypes. While cased images fell out of favor in the mid-1860s, tintypes continued to be made until the turn of the century. Being more durable than daguerreotypes and ambrotypes, they were put in simple paper sleeves or envelopes.

The Case and Its Contents

The cases were usually made from wood, covered in leather, and lined with velvet. The photograph was assembled with a decorative brass mat placed on top of the photograph and then a piece of glass on top of the mat. This order of assembly kept the glass from actually touching the photograph.

These items were then taped with *adhesive paper*, which the 1854 *Dictionary of Photographic Arts* described in the following manner:

“An adhesive paper used for the double purpose of cementing the daguerreotype plate and a diaphragm and glass which cover it together, and to protect the picture from the action of the atmosphere.”¹

The interesting terminology of *action of the atmosphere* referred to tarnishing, which is the daguerreotype’s most common enemy.

After about 1846, the plate, mat, and glass were placed in a brass frame, called the *preserver* or *protector*, and

the edges or flaps of this preserver were crimped around the complete package. This assembly was then inserted snugly into a case. The tight fit kept everything in place.

The image in Figure i-2 shows how a daguerreotype and case were put together. This assembly process was also used for ambrotypes (with a glass plate) and early tintypes (with an iron plate).

The type of case used for photographs was not new to the era. Similar cases were in use for many years before photographs to hold miniature paintings. Like the photograph cases, the purpose was to protect the image, though the decorative cases also became fashion statements. These were small enough that the cases could be carried in a pocket or handbag and easily retrieved to show friends and family a favorite painting – and after 1840, a photograph.

Many case characteristics are datable, and extensive analysis of these will be presented in further chapters. The daguerreotype, ambrotype, and tintype were available at the same time in the late 1850s and early 1860s. The same case could have been used for each type.

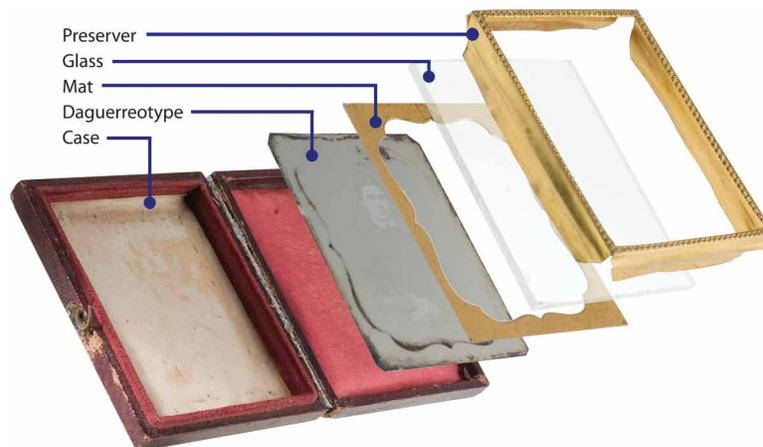


Figure i-2. Typical pieces of a daguerreotype in a case. Components include:

- » Wood case with leather covering.
- » The daguerreotype plate
- » Brass mat
- » Cover glass
- » Preserver